

Assaults inside St. Louis prison raising concerns, MDOC announces Safe Prisons Initiative

The St. Louis prison has seen an increase in violent incidents

ST. LOUIS, Mich. (WJRT) - State and local officials are expressing concern over rising violence at the St. Louis Correctional Facility in Gratiot County, as it houses some of Michigan's most violent inmates.

The St. Louis Correctional Facility, one of two prisons in Gratiot County, saw an attack on two corrections officers on Thursday.

"The prisoner was being subjected to a shakedown, a search, wasn't happy with it, became angry and started punching the officer conducting the search and the officer coming to help him," Byron Osborn, president of the Michigan Corrections Organization, said.

Osborn explained that only three of Michigan's 26 prisons house Level V prisoners, the most violent offenders.

"We have far more Level V prisoners than what can fit in those three facilities," Osborn said. "These facilities that are Level IV, such as St. Louis, they suffer the repercussions of that because a lot of those prisoners are pushed down to that security level."

Gratiot County Prosecutor Laura Bever shared her concerns about the increasing number of assault cases from the St. Louis prison.

"It's definitely on the uptick, there are more and more cases," Bever

said.

Bever had two hearings on separate cases on Friday, including one where officers were injured by an inmate throwing softball-sized rocks.

"Luckily neither of them was seriously injured but enough that they had to go to hospital and miss a day of work," Bever said.

In response to these concerns, the Michigan Department of Corrections announced the Safe Prisons Initiative, which includes targeted training missions.

Osborn indicated that staffing remains a major issue.

"We are anywhere from 15 to 30 percent short on staff, so there is a lot of mandatory overtime," Osborn said.

Bever emphasized the challenge in deterring violence at the facility.

"I have real concerns about what you do to deter that, to make it safe, and as I said, I have a lot of concerns for the corrections officers working in there, keeping them safe," Bever said.

The Safe Prison Initiative will focus on five key areas, including prisoner classification and bed space, as announced by the Michigan Department of Corrections.